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(54) Article transferring device

(57) A mechanism for diverting articles (50) from a first conveying path (11) to a second conveying path (12) comprises a drive chain arrangement (18, 28) comprising chain loops (20) having projecting members (21) over part of their periphery, so that as loops (20) rotate, an article (50) is raised by the projecting members and

conveyed in the direction of the second path. The projecting members comprise rollers (21) arranged between two chains (20). The rollers (21) may be arranged to roll on respective guide rails (23) so that an article is conveyed into the second conveying path in an accelerated manner.

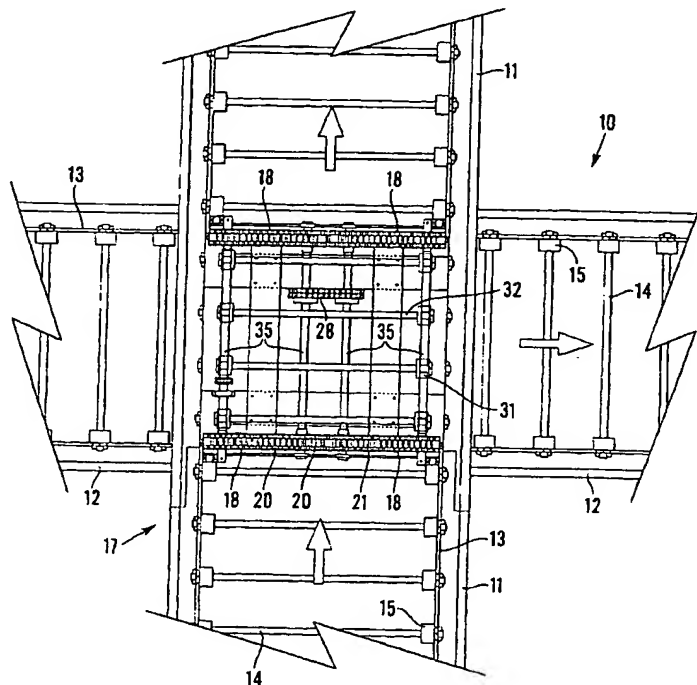


Fig. 1

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Description

[0001] The present invention relates to an article transferring device and, in particular, to a mechanism for diverting pallets moving on a first conveying mechanism in a first direction to a second conveying mechanism in a second direction.

[0002] In existing conveying systems, where two conveyors intersect, essentially both conveyor mechanisms are duplicated in the region of intersection, e.g. rollers and axles conveying in the first direction and their associated drive mechanisms and rollers and axles conveying in the second direction and also their associated drive mechanisms. This leads to a complicated construction in this region which is expensive to produce and difficult to maintain because the space is crowded. The problem is increased where it is desired to provide means for lifting one conveyor mechanism relative to the other so as to select which mechanism is to convey articles away from the intersection.

[0003] The present invention seeks to overcome one or more of the above disadvantages.

[0004] According to a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided an article transferring mechanism for diverting articles travelling along a first conveying path to a second conveying path, the mechanism being arranged below an intersection of the paths and comprising means defining upper surface regions arranged to move transversely of the first conveying path, characterised in that said transverse movement automatically raises said regions to engage an article at the intersection and to move it in the direction of the second conveying path.

[0005] Preferably said conveying means comprises one or more drive web members having members projecting from part of the length thereof and defining said upper surface regions.

[0006] According to a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided an article transferring mechanism for diverting articles travelling along a first conveying path to a second conveying path, the mechanism being arranged below an intersection of the paths and being characterised in that it comprises rotating means having an asymmetrical periphery whereby, in one rotational disposition of said rotating means, it does not operatively engage an article at the intersection and, in another rotational disposition of said rotating means in which a different section of said periphery is uppermost, it operatively engages a said article.

[0007] Preferably said rotating means comprises one or more web members in the form of continuous loops having members projecting from a part of the length of their periphery.

[0008] In preferred arrangements said projecting members project from 30 to 70% of the length of the web members. This ensures that, in at least one disposition of the web members, no contact is made with an article located thereabove and, in at least one other disposition

of the web members, contact is made with a substantial part of such an article.

[0009] The projecting members are preferably rollers. A guide, e.g. in the form of a rail, may be located beneath the rollers so that the rollers roll therealong. This has the advantage of moving an article along the second conveying path in an accelerated manner.

[0010] The web members are preferably in the form of chains, preferably two parallel chains with the projecting members, e.g. the rollers, located therebetween. This forms a particularly stable arrangement, especially when the rollers roll on the guide rail.

[0011] Exemplary embodiments of the present invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 shows a top view of a conveying system incorporating an article transferring device in accordance with a first embodiment of the invention; Figure 2 shows an enlarged side section view of the device of Figure 1;

Figure 3 shows a view corresponding to Figure 2 during the transfer process;

Figure 4 shows a modification of the system of Figures 2 and 3; and

Figure 5 shows a second embodiment of the invention.

[0012] With reference to Figure 1, a conveying system 10 is composed of two mutually-perpendicular conveyors 11 and 12 with rails 13. Conveyors 11 and 12 are essentially continuously running. Axles 14 carrying wheels or rollers 15 at their ends are rotatably-mounted at equally-spaced fixed locations along the rails 13. Each conveyor is driven by a means of a motor (not shown) connected by gearing (not shown) to wheels 15. The pallets 50 travelling along each conveyor are propelled smoothly along by riding on the wheels 15.

[0013] In the region of the intersection 17 of the conveyors 11, 12, conveyor 11 comprises rollers 31 connected by axles 32 and arranged to be driven by the same motor as the rest of conveyor 11. The rollers 31 are slightly closer together than wheels 15 and are at the same level.

[0014] A drive system comprising a number of chain drive mechanisms 18, 28 is also provided in the intersection region 17. The drive system extends over substantially the entire width of both conveyors 11, 12. Each mechanism 18 comprises two drive chains 20 running on hardened guides 37 and held at a spacing apart. The chains pass around sprockets 19 to form endless loops. The sprockets 19 at the top and bottom of the intersection region 17 as shown in Figure 1 are interconnected by drive shafts 35, and the adjacent drive shafts 35 of the left and right drive mechanisms 18 in Figure 1 are interconnected by a drive mechanism 28 which comprises two shorter drive chains. All the drive mechanisms 18 are connected via shafts 35 and mechanism 28 to a

common drive motor (not shown).

[0015] The top runs of the drive chains 20 are arranged to extend just below the level of rollers 31, as shown in Figure 2. Also as shown in Figure 2 centre free rollers 21 are provided between the chains 20 of each mechanism 18 over about 60% of the length of the chains to form a power and free chain assembly in a so-called "triplex" arrangement. When the rollers 21 are in the top run of the drive chains 20, see Figure 3, their top surfaces project above the level of rollers 31.

[0016] In use, pallets 50 on conveyor 11 can be transported on wheels 15 and rollers 31 from the bottom to the top of Figure 1 as indicated by the arrows. If, however, it is desired to divert an incoming pallet 50 to the right hand part of the conveyor 12, the pallet is stopped by a separate conventional stop mechanism (not shown) when the pallet reaches the intersection region 17. The motor for the drive mechanisms 18 is then actuated so that drive chains 20 move from the position shown in Figure 2 so that rollers 21 are brought underneath pallet 50 and are moved from left to right. This has the effect of lifting pallet 50 and carrying it to conveyor 12 as shown in Figure 3. Once part of the pallet 50 is on outgoing conveyor 12, the wheels 15 of the conveyor 12 pull the pallet 50 off the intersection 17. After the chains 20 have completed a single rotation, pallet 50 has been completely transferred to conveyor 12 and the chains return to the position shown in Figure 2.

[0017] An advantage of the above-described system is that it is compact. In particular the intersection region 17 where the pallets are to be diverted is uncluttered. The system is energy-efficient since the motor for mechanisms 18 is only actuated during a diverting operation. The system also allows pallets to be diverted quickly which can be essential to a large factory or assembly line. The mechanism of the present invention has less moving parts, which makes it safer to operate and has less chance of malfunction due to its robust design.

[0018] Various modifications may be made to the above-described arrangement. For example, each of the mechanisms 18 as shown in Figure 2 may be replaced by a single longer mechanism extending over substantially the entire width of the conveyor 11. Alternatively there may be three or more drive mechanisms 18 extending over the width of the conveyor. One or more additional mechanisms or sets of mechanisms 18 may be provided centrally between the top mechanisms and bottom mechanisms as shown in Figure 1. The rollers 21 may extend over 30 to 70% of the length of each drive chain.

[0019] For each mechanism 18, a single drive chain 20 with attached rollers 21 on one or both sides may be used instead of the triplex arrangement disclosed. Alternatively each mechanism 18 may comprise of three or more chains 20 with corresponding numbers of chain rollers 21. The rollers 21 may be replaced by projecting members of other cross-section such as square blocks, or by a continuous raised belt member. The chains 20

may also be replaced by other suitable web members such as belts.

[0020] For each mechanism 18, the chain(s) 20 and the rollers 21 may be replaced by a belt having a thin section and a thick section connected at both ends to form a continuous loop. When the thin sector is uppermost its upper surface is at or just below the level of rollers 31; when the thick section is uppermost, its upper surface is higher than the level of rollers 31, thus lifting and moving a pallet 50 at the intersection 17.

[0021] Mechanism 18 may be replaced by suitably adapted wheels or rollers with circumferences which have a normal circular portion and an enlarged portion in the manner of a cam member. Upon rotation, when the enlarged portion comes under a pallet at the intersection 17, it raises the pallet and moves it in the direction of conveyor 12.

[0022] The two conveyors 11, 12 may meet at different angles and/or may be on slightly different levels. This allows the conveyors 11 and 12 and the article transferring device 18 to be employed in any situation and be set up to operate within a confined space and used to turn virtually any angle.

[0023] The conveying system 10 may be used to convey articles other than pallets, in which case the size, shape and position of the conveying elements are changed as necessary.

[0024] In a further modification, Figure 4 the drive mechanisms 18' each contain a hardened steel guide 23 located between and slightly below the top runs of the drive chains 20. The position of guide 23 is such that rollers 21 roll thereon as they are moved from right to left. Thus guide 23 constitutes a so-called accelerator rail in that a pallet 50 is not only raised relative to rollers 31 but is conveyed to the right at twice the speed of the drive chains 20.

[0025] Figure 5 shows a second embodiment of the invention comprising a conveying system 110 comprising a single conveyor with mutually perpendicular paths 111, 111'. At the junction 117 of the paths there is provided an article transferring device as described in connection with Figures 1 to 3 or Figure 4. Junction 117 can be a loading and/or unloading point of the conveying system, or it may be simply a location where the conveying path is constrained to turn a corner.

Claims

1. An article transferring mechanism for diverting articles travelling along a first conveying path (11) to a second conveying path (12), the mechanism being arranged below an intersection (17) of the paths and comprising conveying means (20) defining upper surface regions arranged to move transversely of the first conveying path, characterised in that said transverse movement automatically raises said regions to engage an article (50) at the inter-

section and to move it in the direction of the second conveying path.

2. A mechanism according to claim 1, wherein said conveying means comprises one or more drive web members (20) having members (21) projecting from part of the length thereof and defining said upper surface regions. 5
3. An article transferring mechanism for diverting articles travelling along a first conveying path (11) to a second conveying path (12), the mechanism being arranged below an intersection (17) of the paths and being **characterised in that** it comprises rotating means (20) having an asymmetrical periphery whereby, in one rotational disposition of said rotating means, it does not operatively engage an article (50) at the intersection and, in another rotational disposition of said rotating means in which a different section of said periphery is uppermost, it operatively engages a said article. 10 15 20
4. A mechanism according to claim 3, wherein said rotating means comprises one or more web members (20) in the form of continuous loops having members (21) projecting from a part of the length of their periphery. 25
5. A mechanism according to claim 2 or 4, wherein said projecting members (21) project from 30 to 70% of the length of the web members (20). 30
6. A mechanism according to claim 2, 4 or 5 wherein said projecting members are rollers (21). 35
7. A mechanism according to claim 6, wherein a guide (23) is located beneath said rollers (21), the rollers being arranged to roll on the guide.
8. A mechanism according to any of claims 2 or 4 to 7, wherein said web members (20) comprise chains. 40
9. A mechanism according to claim 8 wherein said web members comprise two generally parallel chains and said projecting members (21) are located between said generally parallel chains. 45
10. A mechanism according to claims 7 and 9 wherein said guide is a guide rail (23) arranged between and below said generally parallel chains. 50

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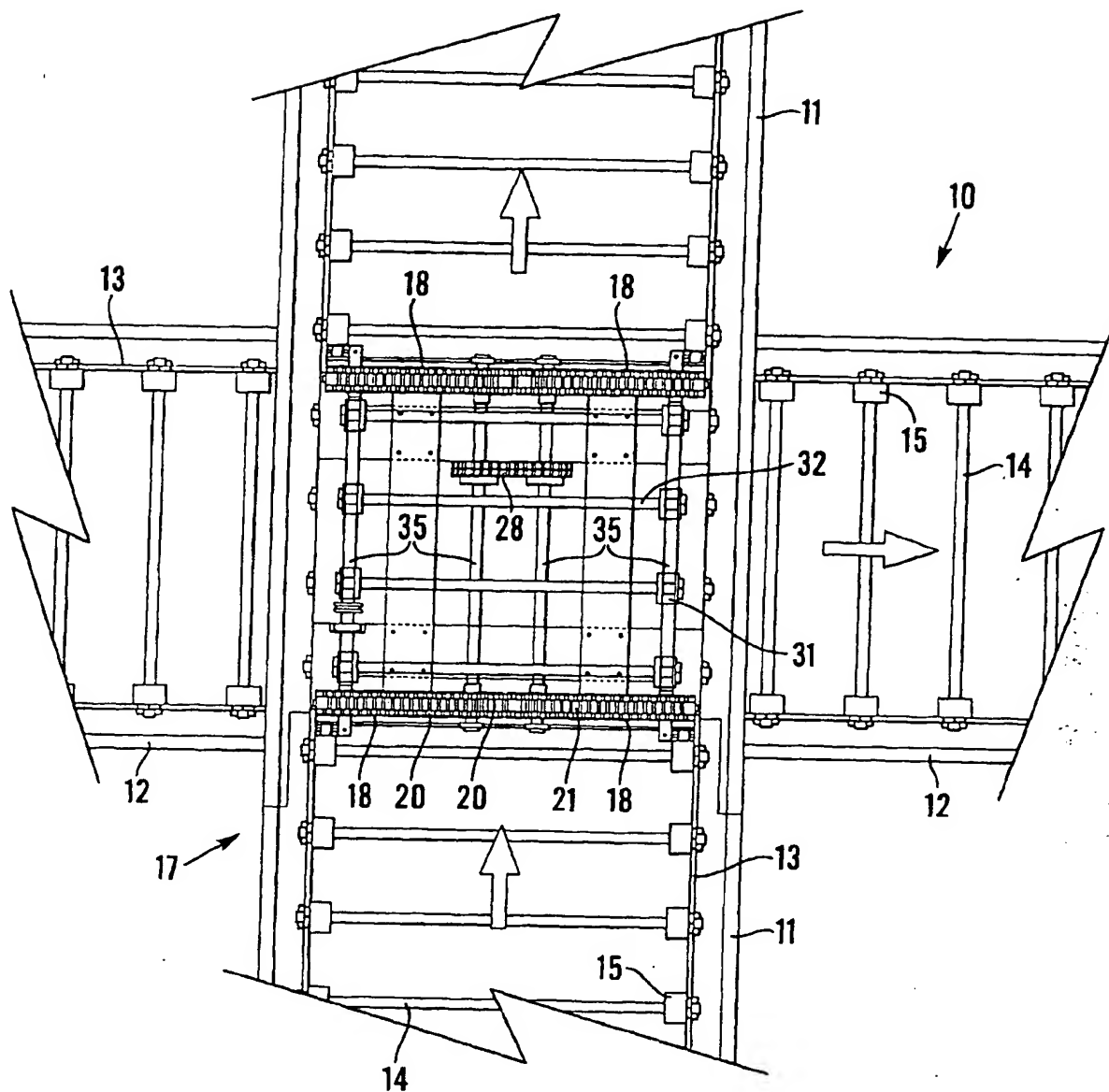
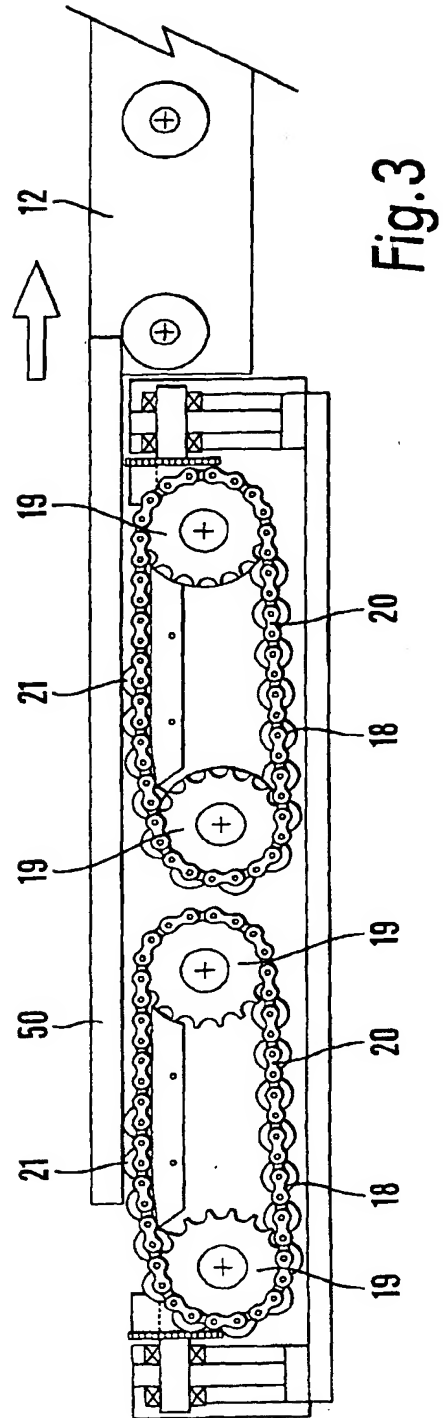
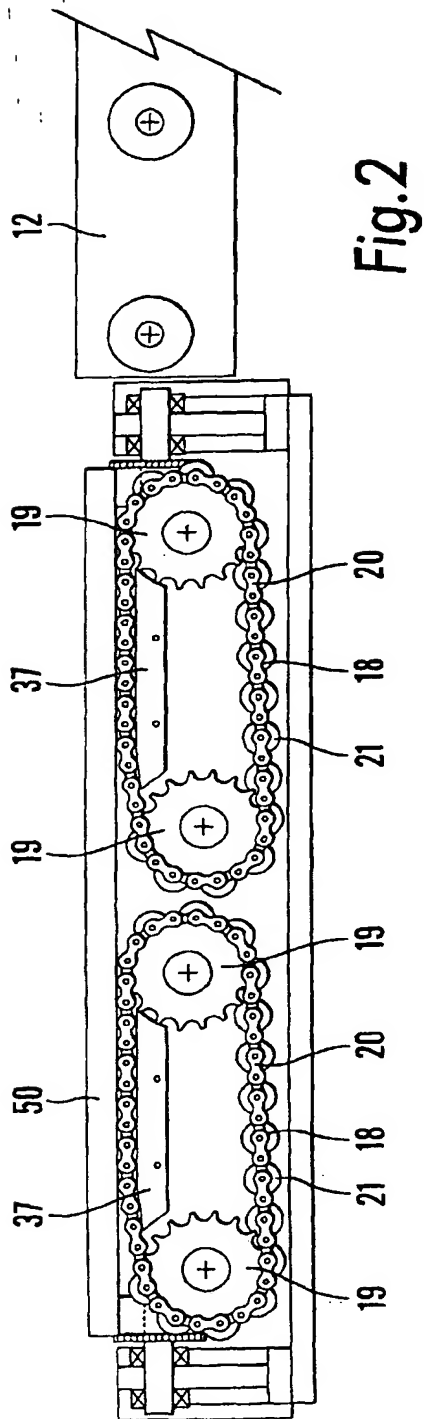


Fig. 1



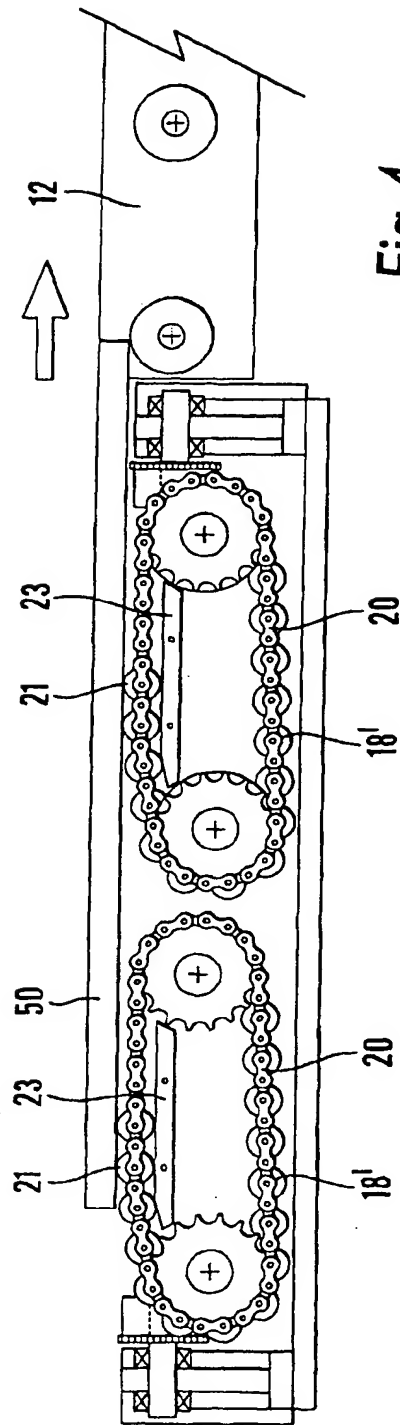


Fig. 4

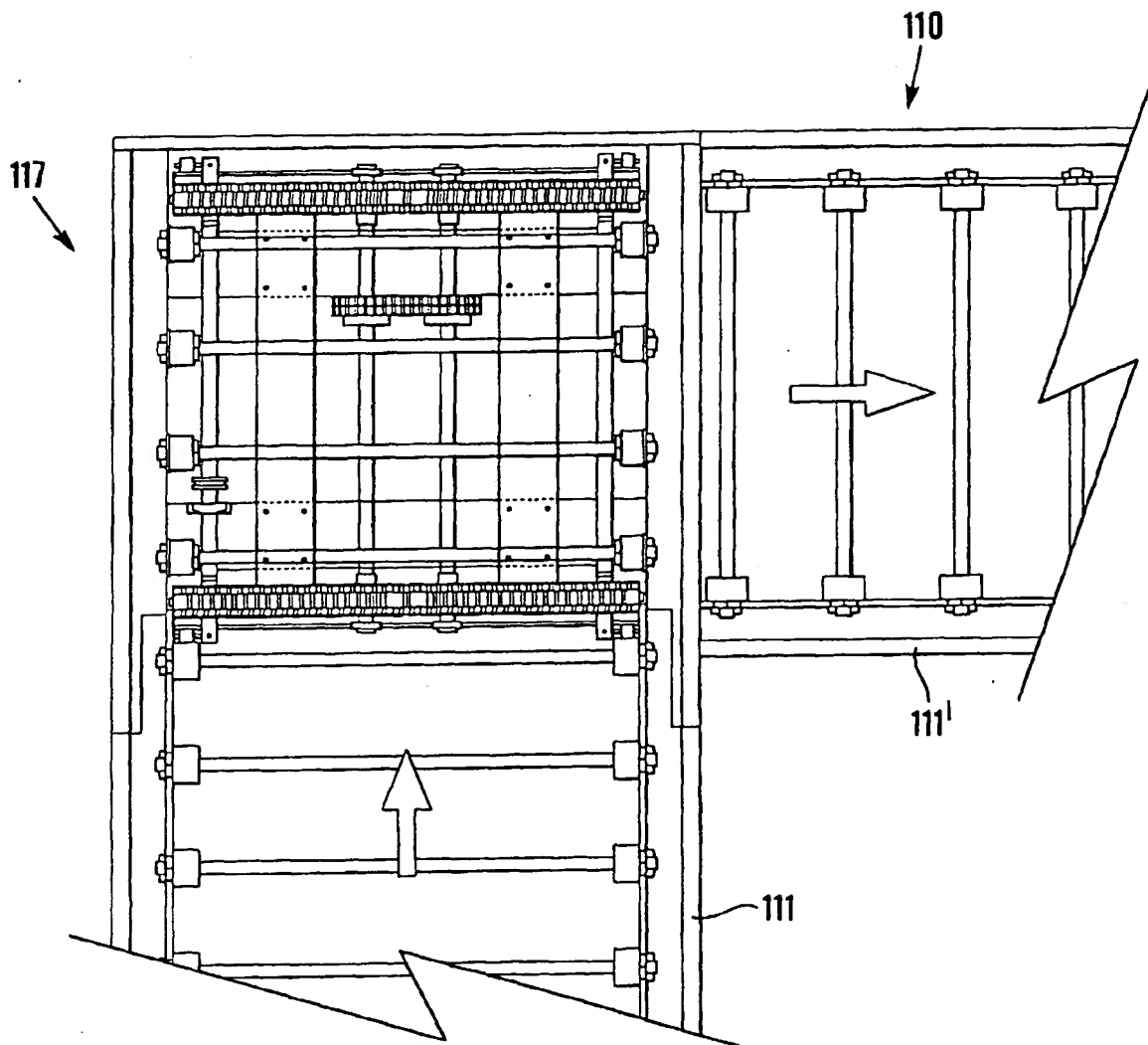


Fig.5



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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 01 30 7176

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
X	US 3 104 004 A (REDLICH AUGUST V ET AL) 17 September 1963 (1963-09-17) * column 2, line 5 - line 20 * * column 2, line 35 - line 40 * * column 2, line 46 - line 59 * * column 3, line 38 - line 75 * * figures 1,4,5 *	1-5,8,9	B65G47/53
Y	* figures 1,4,5 *	6,7	
X	US 5 743 375 A (SHYR DUEN-JYH ET AL) 28 April 1998 (1998-04-28) * column 1, line 46 - line 48 * * column 2, line 16 - line 20 * * column 2, line 36 - line 39 * * column 2, line 52 - line 67 * * column 3, line 1 - line 41 * * claim 1; figures 1,2 *	1-5,8	
Y	* column 2, line 52 - line 67 *	6,7	
X	US 3 782 527 A (PETERSHACK V) 1 January 1974 (1974-01-01) * column 2, line 1 - line 68; figure 1 *	1,3	
A	DE 26 53 039 A (AXMANN NORBERT ING GRAD) 24 May 1978 (1978-05-24) * the whole document *		
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search MUNICH		Date of completion of the search 23 November 2001	Examiner Clivio, E
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	
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**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
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For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82